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ABSTRACT

This paper argues for a synthesis between the major competing paradigms of empirical positivism and critical theory, into a multiperspective methodology. Citing recent efforts to incorporate such a merger, the paper concludes that, though such a copula appears necessary, it remains problematic when considered within the context of an immutable reliance on empiricism in most graduate education in mass communication curriculum at American universities. The paper's first section (of seven) assesses the current situation, while the second section discusses what is wrong with the dominant perspective. The European perspective is the topic of the third section, and the fourth section discusses a mutual convergence. The fifth section makes special note of three particular broad-based perspectives: interpretive analysis, macrosocial studies, and cultural studies. A methodological synthesis is the focus of the sixth section, while the future is the topic of the seventh section. One hundred one references are attached. (SR)

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TOWARD A SYNTHESIS OF MULTIPLE METHODOLOGIES

by

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A SYNTHESIS OF MULTIPLE METHODOLOGIES
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ABSTRACT

Following the thrust of the landmark journal "Ferment in the Field," this paper argues for a synthesis between the major competing paradigms of empirical positivism and critical theory, into a multiperspective methodology. Citing recent efforts to incorporate such a merger, this paper concludes that, though such a copula appears necessary, it remains problematic when considered within the context of an immutable reliance on empiricism in most graduate education in mass communication curriculums at American universities.

I. WHERE WE STAND

While the need for a broader and more eclectic methodological map in which to address issues in mass communication scholarship was brought into sharp focus by the 1983 edition of Journal of Communication, entitled Ferment in the Field, there had long been a recognition that adherence to a narrowly focused methodology limits the scope of understanding. Even in the dawn of inquiry into mass communicated messages, The Payne Fund studies of the 1930s incorporated multiple methods of quantitative research, in the form of controlled experiments, content analysis and surveys, along with naturalistic qualitative observations of the subjects (Wartella, 1987).

In the following decade, the "arch" empiricist Paul Lazarasfeld (1941) recognized that the texture of the social situation and a phenomenological understanding of the construction of human values needed to be considered along with the quantification of survey data. Other social scientists of his era (e.g., Hovland, 1959; Campbell & Fiske, 1959) also acknowledged the value to be gained by a diverse methodology.

In recent years, Lull (1985) envisaged a convergence of quantitative and qualitative research methods as the only expedient that could release the potential for accurate description and explanation of significance of communication in all contexts. Jensen (1986a) argued for a qualitative and quantitative research design to investigate media audiences, while House (1977) noted that such leading scholars of quantitative measurement as Donald Campbell and Lee Cronbach supported the inclusion of qualitative studies in research programs. And in a review of the state of mass communication scholarship, Weaver (1988) argued for more studies employing quantitative as well as qualitative methods, although these designs were

notably limited to techniques within the confines of an positivistic framework. Besag's (1986, p.8) aphorism summarizes this viewpoint well: When we view problems from the perspective of only one methodology, our answers will, of necessity, be inadequate.

Some have termed this multiperspective approach triangulation, which is broadly defined as a combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomena (Denzin, 1978; Cantor, 1987; Jick, 1979; Patton, 1980; Borman, LeCompte, & Goetz, 1986). Triangulation is seen as a general technique for reconciling "facts" obtained through data collection that, according to Lindolf and Meyer (1987), can shed valuable light on phenomena that would remain obscured if only one method was relied on. However, as commonly posited, triangulation, though advocating the use of different methodologies, is in practice based on the positivist guidelines of the compilation of observable factual data (Denzin, 1978, p.28), and is therefore actually seeking answers to the same class of variables.

From this view, triangulation can be analogized to a radar search. Radar is a valuable tool for measuring the presence, location, and characteristics of aircraft but lacks the singular ability of placing its findings into a meaningful contextual framework; alone it can tell the observer little about the origin, history, intention or significance of the object in question. However, like triangulation (which is also a radar term), radar can be employed in a variety of modalities without ever abandoning its "methodological" skin. It can select a range of frequencies, pulse patterns, sweeps, areas of search and, modes (passive or active) to measure the same object. But through it all the basic conceptual premise of the measurement device remains unaltered. Triangulation simply chooses different implements from the same methodological

"tool box" that limits what the knower can ever know.

However, when radar is supplemented by personal observation of a target, when this is amplified by verifiable reports of an aircraft's derivation and the intentions of those who launched it, and when the information is placed into an historical framework by a rational exposition of the contextual situation, we achieve a breadth of description and depth of understanding that leads to a heuristically richer experience and allows for more confidence in making predictions and interpretations.

This is analogous to the ideal of a truly multiperspective methodology, one that is aimed at expanding the scope and dimension of explanation that positivism can offer, combined with an interpretive construction of text, along with a rationally formulated critical inquiry of organizational structures. Such a holistic strategy extends the bounds of our epistemology beyond gathering data or the recording of factual observations, the source of empirically formulated quantitative or qualitative methods. It also broadens the focus of a critically rational approach, a method that potentially can provide meaningful evidence, to a more comprehensive plateau that gives such findings verifiable significance.

That such an amalgamation between critical and empirical methods is even considered a topic for discussion is a recognition of the shallowness inherent in a stale and narrowly focused methodology; whether it is possible to concatenate these seemingly insoluble schools depends upon the practitioners in place, and on those who will shortly enter the field.

"Ferment" sounded the clarion call in attempting to breech the gulf between the American model based on positivism, a methodology with a distinctive behaviorist flavor fashioned after a quantitatively oriented

social psychology, with the European based humanistic, rational, cultural, and critical approach. Writing the epilogue in "Ferment," George Gerbner (p.359) argued for a merger of the competing traditions and suggested that, as the proof of the methodological pudding is in the testing, researchers should not be inhibited from selecting or developing and using any methodology suitable to the problem. The intervening years since the publication of "Ferment" has seen only episodic spurts of operationally linking these divergent traditions, but recently, as noted by the publication of an important two volume work edited by Dervin, Grossberg, O'Keefe, and Wartella, there appears to be a renewed interest in constructing interdisciplinary linkages with diverse analytical tools (1989, vol. 1, p.15; vol. 2, p.26-27).

The ultimate aim of multiple perspectives has been endorsed by antipositivists as well as positivists. From a critical viewpoint, Jakubowicz (1989) concluded that a theoretical and methodological pluralism appears to be the unavoidable final solution to paradigm dialogues. Craig (1989) proposed an incorporation of empirical, critical, and hermeneutic methodologies into what he termed a "practical discipline," a transformation that rejects the reductionism and technical practices of empiricism, along with rebutting the strict adherence to the often radical sociohistorical analysis of critical inquiry. Smythe and Van Dinh (1983), argued that the union of quantitative data is a valuable addition to their research agenda, a position supported by Melody and Mansell (1983) in their suggestion that one needs to rely on both empirical data and critical reasoning so that evidence may be managed in a systematic manner. Murdock (1989) looked upon the task facing critical inquiry as working toward the inclusion of empirically grounded answers to problems, while

Fejes (1985) chastised fellow critical theorists for taking the media audience for granted, and charged that macrostructural research be expanded to include individual-level effects. To Servaes (1989), the challenge for the coming decade is a merger into a single research project of analytical reason with empirical social science techniques.

Others, like Halloran (1983), contended that scholars in the field should seek to promote a methodological diversity, as long as it excluded ideological overtones, a tact which McQuail (1984) supported in his call for a cultural-empirical "bridge-building." Corcoran (1989) saw communication studies as needing a multidisciplinary approach, one that cuts across traditional boundaries of academic classification. Rogers (1982) delineated areas of agreement and proposed particular directions through which the two main protagonists could ecumenically form a multiple methodology, and later acknowledged that even for a "quantitative-functionalist" there are benefits to be gained by a "modest" shakeup in the field (Rogers, 1989, p.210). Giddens (1989), saw an "emerging synthesis" rising to challenge the dogma of the two major traditions. Habermas (1971) suggested that the purpose behind an amalgamation is to link the methodology with the interest that guides the project, a position that Lang and Lang (1983) noted had long been reversed; the choice of method had been allowed to determine the problem for study.

As exemplars of multiperspective approach, Mancini (1987) explained that the distinctive characteristic of Italian mass communication research is the use of combined methods garnered from the empirical and critical schools. Putnis (1987) noted a move in Australia toward cultural studies without abandoning empirical methods. Fitchen (1981) cited cases from The Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria and Sweden where critical and

empirical analyses were merged in mass media studies, while Mander (1987) reported that Bourdieu supplemented his analytical inquiry into social relations with rigorous empirical measures. Real (1989) used a critical cultural approach that incorporated insights from the empirical behaviorism, to study popular mass media genres. And in an innovative departure, Lemert (1989) linked empirical techniques with Marxist, cultural, and social responsibility thought to critically evaluate media performance.

Despite these seminal efforts, and an emerging awakening about the importance of cross-fertilization between the two major paradigms, one still encounters widespread reluctance to abandon narrowly focused and balkanized research regimes. This resistance in adapting an operational multiperspective approach comes primarily from two sources. One is the frequently articulated debate over the manner in which problematics are formulated, mass communication vs. communication as culture. This in turn defines the goals of research, the often habitually sectarian polemics dealing with issues of objectivity, critical versus administrative, structuralism versus positivism, political ideology, and the boundaries of science. To label the discourse as "mass communication" directs us to the study of one isolated segment of the phenomena, focused on the traditional American mainstream approach of empirical behaviorism, a perspective that Real (1989) rightly charged as being limited in reach, primarily one-dimensional, and to an extent, theoretically sterile.

However, these arguments in no way unequivocally validates many of the alternative critical perspectives, for although there are those from this orientation who articulate a willingness to accept a number of basic empirical tenets they do so from a pronounced ideological base that has,

at its underpinnings, the emancipation of society from the stranglehold of liberalism.

The other avenue of resistance is more pragmatic: How can one possibly be skilled in such a broad methodological landscape? The facile answer is that beyond a tangential familiarity with a variety of methods, it may appear that one cannot be expected to be expert in a wide range of inquiries. However, this may be more a result of the manner in which the phenomena of communication has been marginalized into mass on one hand, with its emphasis on microlevel analysis, and institutional-structural, macrolevel analysis on the other hand, than on any inherent epistemological reasons. To overcome this requires a reorientation in the way we approach the framing of questions, and the collection and interpretation of evidence. It will require a concept that I will expand upon below, a methodological synthesis. Fejes (1985), Grossberg (1987), Robinson (1989) among others, have hinted at such a synthesis by suggesting that when findings are reached at one level, additional levels and aspects of the same phenomenon should be explored. For example, to assume the behavior of mass audiences, based solely on evidence uncovered in the investigation of text (e.g., Herman & Chomsky, 1988)[1] is as presumptive as is quantitative scholarship's wide ranging effects studies that fail to account for the historical context, institutional structures, or culturally constructed meaning of messages. Alone these are, at best, presumptive conjectures, or statistically refutable null hypotheses. Fused they can provide the basis for a more holistic understanding and explanation.

The first problem posed, the epistemological one, is more difficult to overcome for it is often tied to deeply-held ideological convictions,

compounded by a world-view that permeates much of the competing scholarship that not only delimits the range of acceptable solutions but frequently disparages partisans of opposing camps[2]. It is through an appreciation of the conceptual cores of these positions that we can attempt to grasp the feasibility of forming a more consensual perspective, one which looks at each situation not simply as an aggregation of occurrences but as phenomena occupying a particular time and place, and with historical antecedents that gives meaning not only to the subject but to the observer as well.

II. WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE DOMINANT PERSPECTIVE?

Mass communication research is guided by a set of general protocols with claims at demystification and verity. But often these claims act as a vehicle for transformation between the "is" and the "ought to be." What is purported to be an affirmation of epistemological reality is taken to task, by one school or the other, for being either a systemic artifact of bourgeoisie mentality; derivatives of case-studied, anecdotal narratives with little replicable or generalizable truths; or a product of politically guided subjective statements lacking empirical validity.

These are the paramount assertions in contemporary research, postulations built around, what has been termed the "dominant paradigm" (Hall, 1989; Krippendorff, 1989; Ito, 1989), the locus of American social research based on a positivistic philosophy that sees the role of science as predicting and explaining regularities that can be known only by systematic observation through the investigator's senses (Keat & Urry, 1982). Balanced against this is the dialectics of a critical approach that

assumes a priori axiomatic statements through reasoned logic and rational thought, a position that inherently disavows a dichotomy between the subjective and objective realm. The choice of method formulated on the basis of either of these particular paradigms frames the course of the research by directing the investigator's focus.

The American experience of positivism and behaviorism often leads researchers to avoid certain intriguing questions because they do not lend themselves to quantitative measurement (Davison, 1987; Besag, 1986). Positivist methodology assumes support for a hypothesis on the basis of correlational coefficients that makes the data interesting primarily because it beats the laws of chance and owes its heritage to principles that are commonly accepted in the natural sciences[3]; to categorically transfer such a structure to the understanding of human behavior or social relationships, is what Rowland (1987) called the "theoretical blinders of positivistic communication research."

This is far from a novel notion. Over two centuries ago the Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico (1948) argued that the social sciences were scientific only in the sense that they aimed at systematic knowledge but having no analogy in the physical and biological world seemed better suited to be considered part of the humanities or at least required a distinctive mode of explanation. In contemporary thought, Wilden (1972) offered that as open (social) systems typically deal with configurations of multiple interdependence rather than discrete linear relations, the notion of causation, a central concern to the natural sciences, becomes problematic to the social sciences.

The thrust behind this line of discourse speaks to the core issue of objectivity that becomes as much a part of the observer as the object under study; therefore all knowledge is socially constructed, since what the mind "sees" is shaped by assumptions that frame the investigation. Facts do not exist independent of human thought; the constructs of the empirical investigator are creations of the research enterprise that are imposed from "without" the social practice, such as in the application of questionnaires which not only raises the respondents' awareness to the questions asked, but focuses attention and forces them to decide on alternatives that may not have otherwise occurred to them, then reports the interconnections under the guise of uncovering an independent reality.

Objectivity forms the basis of a scientific model that Sampson (1978, p.1332) classified as Paradigm I, a design that subscribes to the traditional ideal of value-free observation followed by value-free analysis. The conception of Paradigm I argues that something is scientific insofar as it is objective, eliminating the knower from the knowledge that is being obtained and holds to the belief that there is a world of value-free "facts" to be grasped independently of the context in which they appear. But even while advocating that scientists should strive to be value-free, Sampson acknowledged as being unattainable".

Whether metaphysically or in praxis there is no way scientists can be disengaged from values. Myrdal (1968) insisted a "disinterested" social science has never existed and never will, for a view presupposes a viewpoint; research, like every other rationally pursued activity, must have direction. The viewpoint and the direction are determined by our interest in the matter. Valuations enter into the choice of approach, the selection of problems, the definition of concepts, and the gathering of data,

and are by no means confined to the practical or political inferences drawn from theoretical findings. The flaws in the practice of empirical positivism go beyond the question of objectivity, which is inherent in all methods, and transcends the technological dilemma of validity, reliability, generalizability, conceptualization, operationalization and measurement. It supersedes the charge that such an appeal only serves to reinforce the reigning social system, or that it is noncumulative variable analysis that lacks a theoretical basis. It is ultimately a problem of where one looks to obtain data; for empirically based methods the individual has proved a convenient host, a focus that led Gitlin (1980) to charge it with being a continued reaffirmation of a Pavlovian stimulus-response psychology.

Treatment of the communication process in the compartmentalized manner suggested by Laswell's (1948) model of source, content, channel, audience and effect also helps propagate a view that is linear and deterministic, while ignoring the greater historical, textual, and structural implications. Such a mode of investigation appears ill-suited for ever hoping to locate the impact of the omnipresent mass media as a system apart from other influences of the greater social order or for revealing the contextually bound polysemic nature of media text.

This then is the cynosure of the dominant methodology in mass communication research as practiced on this side of the Atlantic, isolating communication behavior from the wider sociopolitical culture, and emphasizing outcomes over structure, which at times treats the human condition as if it were a machine emitting patterned and measured responses that can be charted and gauged, much the same as an EEG records cerebral impulses.

III. THE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

The macrolevel rational humanistic perspective is founded upon a European tradition of belief in a generally monolithic, undifferentiated, and hierarchically ordered social mass. The science that emerged has generally been critically oriented, a sociology of knowledge that reflects a coalition of views combining a theory of the reigning social order with a philosophy of science. The emphasis is on culture that frames research about the mass media as elements in a whole way of life, and which needs to be considered in its relationship to everything else. Such scholarship believes that the richness of the communication process is missed in a purely quantitative evaluation. It found its most profound expression in the critical theory of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research that, while essentially Marxist in nature[5], was originally derived from the teachings of Nietzsche who despised the pedantry of those who advocate the quantification of facts as a product of reason (Friedman, 1981).

Also disturbing to the rationalism of the critical perspective is positivism's "taken-for-granted" meaning of a variable that critical theorists charge is merely the reproduction of the researcher's own social perspective. Bourdieu (1984) argued that both the dependent and independent variables are themselves complex entities rather than simple monistic measures. The specific configuration of any variable is dependent upon the social field within which it is developed in a specific research problem. Because each variable is always a particular arrangement of different features, it is the researcher's task to identify the actual conditions that are being determined from what is doing the determining.

To critical research the practice of positivism is to deny the analytical faculty of rational reasoning by allowing it only the ground of utter facticity to operate on; its major function is therefore to simply categorize facts. Critical scholars argue that the "scientific method" of empiricism is intended to apply stringent logic and empirical testing of these facts to ensure the elimination of all metaphysical concepts but in doing so places a great burden on the infallibility of logical inference. However, Mills (1956) charged that while positivism may reject normative questions, Marxist critical research equally ignores this gap between the "ought" and the "is," implying that the normative and descriptive can be bridged by a sensitivity to class struggle and to history, thereby dissolving the boundaries between the normative and empirical wavelengths.

The humanistic tradition faces other problems with heretofore unbroached suppositions. Prime among these is its position on the behavior of mass audiences and the monodimensional assumptions of meaning in media text. A critical approach must come to terms with how audiences select, decode, and make sense of text. Humanists, Schrøder (1987) insists, need the smooth collection of empirical data to understand these patterns.

Nor does an humanist approach hold exclusivity to ontological veracity. It has serious limitations in what it can, through the facility of rational inquisition, ever hope to contribute to a grasp of reality, and often uses research as a means of empowering human beings to take responsibility and control over their lives. Its disavowment of the belief in a detached neutral observer can be acknowledged on an intellectual level; what makes it so bothersome to many is that it not only transforms this percept into an on-going ethical critique that points at not only an

understanding of social life, but at actively changing society (Forester, 1983). This leaves, as Lang (1979) noted, much critical scholarship (particularly Marxist) either unwilling or unable to make a distinction between ideology and science, usually promoting the former in the guise of the latter.

To Outhwaite (1983) a critical approach is confined to the abstract study of reality, without examining the manifestations of reality that are constructed by the individual, and leads it to being misled into a content-equals-effect syndrome, a condition that also happens to afflict many behaviorist approaches. Another charge leveled against Marxist-oriented critical analysis is its emphasis on economic and political factors while ignoring a myriad of other possible historical and cultural causes for the behavior of mass media.

IV. TOWARD A MUTUAL CONVERGENCE

Considering these widely divergent positions the question arises if we can ever hope to find some common ground between critical and empirical schools on which to pursue a research agenda? On a purely metaphysical level I would argue against it for a dogmatic attachment to a critical approach, as Adorno (1969) implied, is an acceptance of epistemological position that interweaves an axiomatic world-view as a sociopolitical litmus test. Although questions surrounding objectivity, and the broader issue of a scientific method abound, it is most likely the Marxist ideology that is the focus of the continued schism between these two approaches. However, there is no compelling rationale why a critical view need be explicitly or even consciously Marxist in nature. Craig (1989, p.120) suggests that critical communication research ranges across the political

spectrum from the relatively "hard" Marxism all the way to liberal-pluralism. For Smythe and Van Dinh (1983, p.123), it simply requires "that there be criticism of the contradictory aspects of the phenomena in their systemic context." A critical approach can also inform interpretive, humanist, structuralist, and macrocultural perspectives (Slack & Allor, 1983; Morgan, 1983). Therefore, to dismiss a rational approach solely for political reasons is patently unproductive for it is often, as Carey (1983) sagaciously noted, through nonpositivist investigations that we can touch the pulse, pace and texture of the American experience with mass media. The course then is not to summarily reject an approach on ideological grounds but to seek a more inclusive, broad based methodology, merging features from positivism and critical analysis along with other micro and macro approaches.

There appears not only to be compelling reasons to justify a merger but also a logical rationale. For one, empiricism, appears often to be manipulative variable analysis, using subjects as simple input-output devices (Delia, 1977) that is often void of direction, a result of, as Carey (1979a) charged, a lack of formal communication theories. While undeniably the best kind of empirical research is theoretically informed, for the most part those that have been posited by American scholarship has generally been borrowed from allied fields such as, linguistics, cybernetics, social psychology, psychology, etc.

On the other hand, humanistic studies require, as many of its adherents now admit, verifiable evidence with which to justify its conclusions. A multiperspective approach will place one camp on firm theoretical ground while informing the other with methods for gaining evidence rather than

relying on unsupported lemmas. The nexus of a multiperspective answer rests not solely on what and how data is gathered but also in the manner research is theoretically contextualized and explanations are constructed.

V. APPROACHES

I would like to make special note of three particular broad based perspectives, that while far from pristine, have proven a fillip to an environment grown stale by a dependence on disparate methodologies. These approaches demonstrate the viability resident in an inchoate corporate methodology.

V.a) Interpretive Analysis

One of the components of this new holism is an hermeneutic approach that aims at seeing every human situation as novel, filled with multiple, often conflicting meaning and interpretations, a position that Putnis (1987) recognized as the central issue in communication studies. Interpretive analysis seeks to understand meaningful human actions in the manner of interpreting texts, by locating them within intelligible frames. Meaning can only be revealed by the observer's perception of the world and unlike positivists, who attempt to separate themselves from the worlds they study, interpretivists participate in the world so as to understand it better and express its emergent features (Denzin, 1983).

Interpretive research can enrich insights gained through a positivist analysis, which generates forms of knowledge in terms of measurement and probabilities such as content analysis, and a critical approach that offers a mechanism for investigating the contextual and historical

relationships that help frame the communicative experience (Halloran, Murdock, & Elliot, 1970; Hartmann & Husband, 1974).

An outgrowth of this approach is discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1985; 1988), a form that advocates an active mixture of methods: Conventional content analysis to account for the basis of unitization and the structural properties of mass media discourse (the manifest content) along with a critical analysis of the latent content and recurrent patterns of linguistic behavior in an aim to view texts as a product of the institutional processes of meanings and codification (Davis, 1985).

Jensen (1986b) adopted this process to an investigation of the microlevel constructions of meaning. Jensen's "reception analysis" is a combination of empirical study of the activity of media users and the content of messages along with participant-observation of the audience member's experience with mass media. It sees the production of meaning as an unfolding process in which the audience negotiates and establishes the categories of meaning. This approach inevitably favors in-depth description and a textual analysis of media discourse through immersion in the contexts in which they occur.

V. b) Macrosocial Studies

A macrosocial approach pivots on many of the same fundamental precepts as does critical theory but lacks the latter's political and economic overtones. Macrosocial research rests upon the principles of hegemony, liberal democratic thought, the reality of communicative orders, and media imperialism, but refrains from adversarial posturing thus remaining more faithful to a basic tenet of a "neutral" science. Macrosocial study

is disturbed by the failure to account for cultural and societal differences that intervene in the communication process and believes, as McLeod and Blumler (1987) relate, that given the world's many different cultures, stratification, media and political systems, it would be implausible to find the reported verities in empirical studies from a few Western societies applying around the globe. These researchers also note the growing signs of dissatisfaction found in other approaches and point to a displeasure among behaviorally oriented researchers with the narrowness and repetitiveness of their data gathering that has led to a self-questioning spirit, the overriding recognition being that audience reactions are <u>not</u> automatic outcomes of media content.

What macrosocial scholarship seeks is empirically based evidence of mass communication phenomena in social system terms. The appropriate strategy for macrosocial analysis is based on the assumption that different systems parameters will differentially encourage or constrain communication roles and behaviors associated with them. For example, the application of macrosocietal perspective to a uses and gratification model is compelling: If peoples' political and social roles effect their expectations of the mass media, then societies with different social and political systems should generate different audience roles in their selection and use of media (McLeod & Blumler, 1987).

Macrosocial research is a unique challenge for it seeks measurements and evaluations that are not presently sensitive enough to discern the locus of change, except in an historical sense. And even then it can only make gross statements about a multitude of variables which may have affected the process. However, this is acceptable for a macrolevel method seeks

to avoid the monocausal theories and single consequences of cause and effect. It is likely that mass communication alone will produce not a single but many consequences, and these consequences may be delayed, sequentially arranged (where media exposure leads to interpersonal discussion which then leads to social outcomes), or influenced by other factors.

The goal of macrosocial understanding leads the researcher to more complex relationships, more variant research strategies, and longer-term and more varied (if less readily accessible) effects. The appeal of macrosocial research is that it avoids the dilemma of a critical approach that demands that one must begin with a theory of society from which to analyze the media, and of conventional empirical research, that has been plagued by a trend toward reductionism into psychological variables.

V. c) Cultural Studies

Cultural analysis, as articulated by Carey (1983, 1989), Hardt (1989), Real (1989), Hall (1986) borrows from particular aspects of interpretive, behavioral, and macrosocial analysis, and ranges across the political spectrum. By encasing communications within a framework of culture it directs our attention to studying an entire way of life for it is through communication that the systematic construction of reality is defined.

Cultural studies builds upon the effects tradition by incorporating this perspective with an examination of the meanings of culturally constructed symbols and the ritualistic process by which communications is created, shared, modified and transformed. It sees the media as part of a whole way of life that is threaded throughout by culture and, in which is embedded the production and reproduction of a system of symbols[4].

Cultural studies draws from critical, interpretive, and structural analysis as well as empirical media-centered findings of behaviorism to examine the context in which meaning is produced, transformed and modified through communication. Cultural studies uses empiricism insofar as it begins analysis and interpretation with verifiable facts. It departs from empiricism in seeking not to explain or predict behavior but to understand it; to interpret its significance and diagnose human meanings.

In its more radicalized version, cultural studies serves as a political critique of contemporary society challenging both liberal pluralism and Marxism as competing theories of society. It focuses on the conditions of class (rather than economics) and ideology as synecdochical of culture as a whole, seeking to link the derivation of social order repression as it is articulated through symbols embedded in mass mediated text (Hall, 1982 & 1986; Lodziak, 1986).

A characteristic of this approach is that it is interdisciplinary, ranging from the social sciences, to the arts and humanities rather than using one set of methods, concepts, and theories. As such, cultural studies serves as not merely one approach among others but as a vantage point from which to utilize selectively the positive contributions of each. It is at once an intergrative and holistic attempt to understand communication performance. In this configuration it comes close to being an operational multiple methodology.

VI. A METHODOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS

A multiperspective methodology is a version of a postpositivist paradigm[7] that seeks not only variable analysis (which can be considered an important initial step in the acquisition of knowledge) but quests for

an understanding that adds depth and seeks significance by placing phenomena in an historically meaningful context. Multiperspectivity offers not only the relatively precise measurement of empiricism to lend statistical confidence that the phenomena under investigation have not occurred purely by chance, but also to grasp what is occurring and why. It attempts to penetrate the dynamics of the construction of meaning (beyond that offered by manifest content analysis which emphasizes the meaning in texts as generated by the message constructor) through an interpretive dissection by the receptor, and then moves onto a holistic, macrolevel inquiry and a critical cultural analysis of the forces that intervene at all points of the process. In doing so it not only sees the process as a total experience, a gestalt in terms of the structure and role of mass media, but in its relationship to the prevailing sociopolitical order, how people give it significance and meaning.

In an attempt to broaden our view of knowledge, we are faced with reframing the process of evaluation in a manner that supplements the purely technical considerations and recognizes that the significance of knowledge is not simply epistemological, but ideological, political, ethical, moral and interpretive as well. The requirement is for an agenda that combines the insightfulness, detail, and analytical thought of the rational approaches with the generality, technique and economy of empiricism. The need is for what Hardt (1989, p.590) calls "an Americanized version of Hegelianism," a dialectical synthesis of extant methodology.

A methodological synthesis accepts the position that part of a scientific attitude is being open-minded about both method and evidence. It recognizes the power of an eclectic multiperspective approach to

phenomena, and realizes, as Comstock (1983) sagely noted, that differing approaches actually raises not different answers but different questions regarding the same problem.

A dialectical synthesis fuses macro and micro level narrative descriptions, interpretive analysis, cultural studies and critical explanations, and incorporates these with qualitative and quantitative empirical data gathering and hypothesis testing. It demands insights that allow for the deciphering of statistical machinations, able to separate the meaningful from the arcane. Such a research perspective recognizes that unreigned statistical procedures can often find significance by manipulation of the measuring device that may have little meaning to the reality of the human condition. Likewise, a multiperspective methodologist is able to read through the polemics that may presumably be products of a political, rather than scientific, endeavor.

A multiperspective synthesis recognizes that the value of replication has often been left to delve into mundane matters of simplistic variable analysis rather than expanding upon inchoate findings by the implementation of other methodological approaches to investigate the implications raised. Such an approach allows one the latitude to seek evidence at various levels of inquiry-- for instance the application of audience effects studies to assumptions posed by critical investigations of the structure of the mass media, the cultural context within which texts are produced and conveyed, and the interpretive linguistic inquiries into the polysemic media messages. Synthesizers exist but generally have limited their inquiries to either purely quantitative statistical meta-analysis (Hearold, 1986; Wolf, 1986) or narrative, historical or

descriptive summaries of empirical studies (Comstock, 1975; Comstock & Paik, 1987; Noblit & Hare, 1985).

A dialectical methodology is not a reactive research mode, an ad hoc gathering and sorting of a diverse set of materials. Rather, it is an affirmational role, requiring innovative research by the synergetic application of multiple methods. Functionally a dialectical synthesizer may be envisioned as a team of various specialists with a mutual understanding of the goals and parameters of the inquiry, an organizational structure that is often used by observational field researchers (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982; Douglas, 1976) where the members studying a particular phenomenon serve to critique and inform each other. A team concept is also common to the medical, psychiatric, and corporate management fields, where specialists from various disciplines and perspectives are engaged in a holistic approach to a problem.

Such a foundational view requires an acquaintance with subject matter and acceptance of alternative approaches that has not been demonstrably apparent in much contemporary scholarship in mass communication and, arguably, may not be readily available tomorrow considering the curriculum in the majority of American institutions.

VII. The FUTURE

There is no denying that academic training affects the area of inquiry one is directed to, the questions raised, and the methods used. The manner in which mass communication is conceptualized in most American universities, as an empirical social science endeavor directed toward marketing and media behavior, persuasion, attitude change and information

processing, devoid of its structural environs and insensitive to changing historical conditions, makes the chances to inform future scholars in more holistic research agenda problematic".

Carey (1979b) considered this a problem with the manner in which many graduate students in mass communication are socialized, not merely in the culture of technology but in a philosophical and ideological attitude that promotes a view of human action devoid of rational assessment, with facts and values divorced from the life-space which they occur. Because much of American mass communication education has emphasized casual and functional models of explanation, it has, for a great part, played little heed to phenomenology, linguistics, structuralism, hermeneutics, and most varieties of social theory.

There are presently a few American institutions that place communication studies within a greater historical, and sociocultural context and that instruct their students in a variety of theoretical perspectives. But whether these schools will produce enough newcomers who, as Bourdieu (Mander, 1987, p.442) suggested, are willing to risk the wrath of their colleagues by choosing innovative approaches (what Bourdieu called "subversion" strategies), remains an open question".

Becker (1989) charged that although the "ferment" seems to be over methodology, the underlying issue appears to be the purpose of communication scholarship, where the dominant paradigm exerts institutionalized academic power (Hall, 1989), and where in its methodology textbooks can be found the last home of an orthodox consensus methodology (Giddens, 1989).

Even considering the above, I suggest that American mass communication research appears particularly positioned to heed the call to

consider an eclectic methodology. Because of its historical location, communication scholarship remains a junior member of the social science fraternity (Zukin, 1981) and retains its basically interdisciplinary flavor (Littlejohn, 1982; Jensen, 1986b), infused with visiting researchers from political science, psychology, social psychology, linguistics, and sociology, who have come to call mass communication scholarship their home.

But the time is running out. Beyond the design of curriculum, there is the work of dissertation committees, coupled with university tenure and review policies, along with the editing and referring of journal articles, and the composition of conference papers (De Fleur, 1988; Robinson, 1988; Corcoran, 1989), all aimed at continuing an emphasis on the dominant paradigm. Within the next decade the field will be inevitably dominated by products of these programs. The need is clear but the outlook is not promising. Save for a few notable exceptions [see note 9], positivism does not appear to be loosening its stranglehold on communication studies and, as Haight (1983) warned, graduate students are not likely to develop methodological competence to test the veracity of critical and other alternative approaches if they have only very limited exposure to diverse methodologies at their universities. Without such an experience I fear that the field will continue to become more fragmented and schismatic with scholars from various, compartmentalized perspectives, working on the margin, churning out research that only serves to reinforce their own pre-existing view of knowledge rather than providing a force for a promethean heuristic of what is actually happening in the world.

NOTES

1) In an expansive and comprehensive analysis of the American news media, Herman and Chomsky (1988) exploit this tactic to the fullest by reaching conclusions on audience behavior by investigating the content of selected news text and the structure of the news organizations.

2) For example, from a critical perspective, Zavarzadeh and Morton (1987, p.28) attack what they consider "the myths of neutral knowledge, posited by empirical scholarship, [and which] is collapsing under the weight of contradictions in the capitalist regime of truth. We find such a pursuit of truth philosophically and politically uninteresting, historically obsolete, and more an amusement for liberal humanists than a serious endeavor for committed intellectuals."

3) Even within the physical sciences there have been challenges to the notion of neutral observer as a cornerstone of a positivist empirical paradigm. Heisenberg's (1958) well-worn "uncertainty principle" argues that all forms of scientific research involves an interaction between the scientist and the object of investigation and what the scientist observes is directly related to, and changed, by this interaction. For Berkeley (1975) an object gains its objectivity only by being observed and thus objectivity stems from the observer, a view that Kuhn (1970) supports with his contention that individual observations are impregnated by the theories of the observer.

4) Kukla (1982) recognized that even a state of "no-values," if it ever could be reached, is just another condition along a value continuum that the observer may find himself in. Hall (1989) argued that a claim of a value-free position is itself a reflection of a particular liberal-pluralistic value.

5) While adopting much from Marx in the spirit of his thought, it would be unfair to label the members of the Frankfurt School as contemporary Marxists. They were repulsed by the practice of Marxism. On the one hand they saw the brutality of the Stalinists in the Moscow brand. On the other hand, Marxism manifested itself in the philistine, bureaucratic, successful European Social Democrats, which they likewise disdained. Therefore, the aim of the Frankfurt scholars was to resurrect true Marxist social research and save it from the vulgar hands of the practicing Marxists.

6) Cultural studies charge that, for the most part, American communication studies separates communication from the wider social, political, and cultural structures in which modern communication systems are embedded. Carey (1979, p.410) reports that one of the approach's leading exponents Raymond Williams laid a portion of the blame to the labeling of the study of communications as "mass communication," which inevitably led to isolating the factors that inextricably bind communications within the surrounding culture.

7) "Postpositivist" is a term used by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.46) to refer to paradigms that represent a genuine break with positivist tradition, and neopositivists to distinguish those who are making adjustments but not radical revisions. I suggest that my multiperspective paradigm, though it incorporates positivistic practices, is still postpositivist much the same as the concept of postmodernity in political development thought goes beyond, but includes modernity, in its conceptualization.

8) In a informal cursory survey, this author reviewed the Dissertation Abstracts International from 1985 (under the assumption that the paradigm debates of the early 1980s would not produce any great degree of change before this year) to April, 1989 (the latest edition in print), and found only 16% of the doctoral dissertations at American universities in the fields of Mass Communication and Journalism, used what could arguably be assessed as interpretive, rational/analytical, or cultural approaches. Sixty-six percent of the nearly 560 dissertations employed a definitive empirical approach, while another 17% could be classified as historical or legal analysis. However, whether these 16%, who were apparently adept in alternative methodologies, can inform American communication curriculum is problematic for many of these new Ph.Ds, judging by their surnames and areas of interest (i.e, media practices in Nigeria, Ghana, Egypt, Korea, etc.) could be assumed to have been exchange students, any number of whom may have returned to their native lands.

9) Everett Rogers (personal communication, June 16, 1989) claims that while there may be only a few American universities (Rogers cites Ohio State, UC San Diego, Iowa, Illinois, and perhaps Temple) that provide alternatives to the dominant paradigm, it is well worth remembering that only about 15 schools produce 90% of all Ph.D's in communications.

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